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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for first-year teacher guidance and orientation by principals are offered in this bulletin. Principals' basic assumptions about teacher orientation should focus on direct assistance or assistance through colleagues to support their development. Recommendations stress positive reinforcement, collegial support, and providing opportunities for teacher learning. (LMI)

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Tips for Principals *from NASSP* September 1989

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How Principals Can Help First-Year Teachers

The survival of new teachers during their first roller-coaster year of teaching has never been so critical, as principals are increasingly faced with a shortage of qualified new teachers. As student enrollment across the nation grows steadily, the simultaneous outward migration of young teachers is expected to have a dramatic impact on the quality of education in the future.

In the first year of attitudinal highs and lows, new teachers experience a "euphoric" stage in September. During this first month, they believe nothing can stop them. Then, around the middle of October, a "curve of disenchantment" begins, resulting in a profound professional attitude shift. By the end of February, some new teachers stop seeing themselves as student advocates and, with lowered self-esteem, begin to see their classroom task as primarily custodial and their personal task as survival.

Principals can adopt a basic set of assumptions in a new teacher orientation and guidance that can turn first-year teachers' disenchantment into a period of growth and development. The assumptions target the principal's assistance for new teachers as either direct assistance or assistance through veteran colleagues.

Basic Assumptions for Principals

- Principals must accept that they cannot provide all the support a new teacher needs. They must endeavor to create a larger school climate of support by getting as many other people involved in providing assistance as possible.
- Most teachers have not suffered publicly until their first year in the classroom. During their first year, new teachers are likely to anguish over their uncertainty and humiliation in the classroom as sustaining public embarrassment on a daily basis.
- Formal teacher education will have minimal effect for new teachers when applied in the classroom. They become bewildered by the realization that although they have pedagogical knowledge, they have not yet developed the skills necessary to actually teach day after day.
- Situations that seemed familiar when observed or tried during student teaching become dilemmas for new teachers as they take on numerous situational responsibilities for the first time in their own classroom.
- The new teacher must still learn how to discipline students. A parallel can be made for the discipline process between teaching and driving. "You get the license, then you learn how to drive."
- Parents have no concept of the need to make allowances for first-year teachers. Their power to add to the stress endured by new teachers is alarming.
- The principal should not be a parental figure for new teachers. If such a relationship is established, new teachers often feel betrayed when the principal disciplines them.

Direct Principal Assistance

- Begin programs to help new teachers before mid-October! Assistance during the first two months is essential.
- Give first-year teachers an easier schedule than veterans. They also need clear delineation of tasks beyond the classroom so they can acquire an overall view of schoolwide performance expectations. The winds of curriculum expectations blowing from basics to self-actualization and back are hard enough to follow, without the added burden of multi-faceted schoolwide expectations.
- Identify a specific veteran teacher who will coordinate the new teacher support program. Veteran teachers can serve as mentors in this program. This will provide a focused staff development for new teachers that is consistent during the first several weeks of the school year. The coordinator can then

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conduct monthly support meetings for new teachers and their mentors. Approach the school site council or parent club for a small stipend for the coordinator.

- Ensure that the schedule of each new teacher and mentor is arranged so they are not teaching at the same time. This allows them to use released time for collegial planning, visitations, and/or observations.
- Support avenues of financial flexibility for new teachers to provide supplementary materials and instructional supplies.
- Conduct faculty meetings as real learning experiences, leaving the sports schedules to be distributed in the mailboxes. Released day meetings can be used for mini-course programs designed to encourage staff development, cluster meetings, peer coaching, and inservice.
- Foster the positive image of the teaching profession by providing opportunities for new teacher involvement in teaching incentive programs with government agencies, private enterprise, and teacher education institutions.
- Enhance the idea of teaching as a calling because this perspective influences the ethos of the building. Encourage questioning and collegial sharing. "What does it mean for these new teachers to grow professionally?"
- Make new teachers aware that while they may feel uncertain and maybe even humiliated at times, in many cases they have more answers than they realize. They bring vitality to the profession!

Principal Assistance Through Veteran Colleagues

- Avoid the "curve of disenchantment" by using the talents and craft knowledge of veteran colleagues to model teaching as a steady pace of growth, not as a series of rollercoaster ups and downs.
- Provide each new teacher with a support group of colleagues and a mentor teacher who has been trained to assist him or her. The principal must be involved in identifying the proper people to help new teachers, but cannot be the main director of the support group.
- Create a climate and specific opportunities in which new teachers talk with other new teachers as well as experienced colleagues about teaching. Managing instructional time, classroom discipline, curriculum standards, motivating and evaluating students, parent conferences, paper correction tips, and grading techniques are possible topics. These topics can be presented via panel and small group discussions or as interactive television sessions that are available any time on campus.
- Support experienced teachers in helping new teachers to realize it is not only advisable, but necessary that they try certain strategies again and again in the classroom until these skills are mastered.
- Recognize the complexities of the pedagogy of teaching and be complimentary to the enterprise of veteran teachers training new colleagues.

With just a little organizational leadership the principal can shift the declining attitude of new teachers from "If I can just get through this year," to "My first year has been such a great source of learning, support, and positive reinforcement that nothing can stop me now!"

Written by Nancy M. Giberson, principal at Torrey Pines High School, San Dieguito School District, Encinitas, Calif.

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